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Suda, Zdenek; Musil, Jiri

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Czech-German Relations: A Sociological View*

JIRÍ MUSIL **
ZDENĚK SUDA **

Central European University, Prague

Abstract: The article is a sociological essay on the various aspects of relations between the Czechs and the Germans. In the first part of the essay the authors stress the significance of Czech-German relations for both partners. It is important not only for the Czechs but also for the Germans. The Czech side should acknowledge, however, important new realities, especially the change in Germany's approach concerning its smaller neighbours, especially in the east. This change is a result of significant structural transformations of German society. The essay aims at sketching three possible basic scenarios of future societal developments in both countries. When building the scenarios for the Czech Republic we considered the main criterion to be its degree of ability to join the European Union. As for Germany, we considered this criterion to be its ability to successfully integrate the so-called 'new lands', i.e. the former German Democratic Republic, into the economic and social system of the Federal Republic. The essay also includes an assessment of the probability of the individual scenarios materialising.

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This text is intended to be a sociological essay dealing with the possible modalities of relations between the Czechs and the Germans. The main part of our paper focuses on the future; nevertheless, due to the fact that these future relations are deeply intertwined with the past, the approach of historical sociology is also applied. This approach should show the roots of the principal difficulties in Czech-German relations as they have developed over time. They became strained especially in the 19th century, under the impact of the German and Czech national movement and deteriorated to a disastrous level in the first half of the 20th century. The political and cultural élites of both societies were burdened by similar impediments. In the first place, they were unwilling to accept their given geopolitical situation and the existing ethnic structure in their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, they refused to take into account the geopolitical shifts that had taken place in Central Europe over the course of modern history and were unable to understand the real meaning of these changes.

The purpose of our essay, however, is not only analytical. Both authors, who have acquired considerable experience of Czech as well as German culture and society, wish also to express their views on the recent developments and, above all, on their future possibilities and risks. Unlike most contemporary studies which treat Czech-German and German-Czech relations chiefly from the perspective of political science and historiography, we seek to interpret these relations sociologically as well. It should be stressed,

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**) Direct all correspondence to Professor Jiří Musil and Professor Zdeněk Suda, Central European University, Prokopova 9, 130 00 Prague, Czech Republic, phone + 420 2 22 78 09 09, e-mail CEU.Prague@ecn.cz

however, that even in sociology neither the analyses of interaction between societies living in nation-states nor those of relations between nations are very frequent. In most cases, sociologists either analyse individual national societies or study their non-contextual general social structures and processes. However, in our time, when trans- and international economic and political structures are being formed and when globalisation processes are gaining momentum, political, social and cultural interaction between national societies should indeed become one of the most important concerns of contemporary sociology.

The interaction between national societies is, of course, determined by a combination of several factors. The main role – depending on the size of the individual societies – is played, firstly, by internal developments of the individual societies, secondly, by the wider geopolitical framework of the interacting societies, and finally, also by the nature and history of relations between the societies, including images, stereotypes and even prejudices mutually entertained by each nation.

Thus our essay concentrates – following the above-mentioned pluralistic conception of the factors determining these interactions – on sketching three possible basic scenarios of societal development of the Czech and the German nations, and on the assessment of their respective probabilities. We shall also try to evaluate each of these three scenarios and see what they mean for mutual relations between the Czechs and the Germans. When building the scenarios for the Czech Republic we considered the main criterion to be the degree of its ability to join the European Union. As for Germany, we considered this criterion to be its ability to successfully integrate the so-called ‘new lands’, i.e. the territories of former East Germany, into the economic and social system of the Federal Republic.

The construction of these scenarios has largely drawn on the findings of a four-year study of contemporary German society which is part of Central European University research programme.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the format of our paper corresponds to its content – it is an essay. This means, among other things, that although the paper made use of a wide range of books, articles, economic analyses and statistical and other data, we have deliberately chosen to merely hint at some of these sources but to avoid, on the whole, the standard detailed reference procedure. The aim is simply to clarify the topical issues and to suggest possible options in the matters of mutual relations available to these two neighbouring societies, and to stress the constructive role sociology may play in the process of their shaping.

False Issues and Wrong Scale of Urgency

The problem of Czech-German relations is important for both partners, despite the differences in their respective territorial and demographic size, power and available resources. Seen from the German point of view, it cannot be assessed separately from the larger issue of Germany's rapports with all nations in its eastern and south-eastern neighbourhood. These relations, virtually throughout modern times, have been a source of tensions and crises that more than once led to a major war. It therefore appears natural that the problem should receive adequate attention from both parties. However, it does not seem at present to be an object of their primary concern. The Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany stated, some time ago, that the Czech-German relationship was

“better than its repute”. This may well be true; yet it does not diminish in any way the need for the Czechs and the Germans to thoroughly examine what conditions have to be met if a good and stable rapport is to be established between the two nations.

At first sight, an observer of the contemporary scene might nevertheless gain the impression that the Czech side were more preoccupied with this problem than its German counterpart. The impression is misleading; what on the Czech part could pass for proof of serious interest in the matter of Czech-German relations is actually a partly irksome, partly embarrassed occasional debate in public and in the media on a very particular, albeit in its own right significant, indirectly related topic; that of the consequences for Czech society of the forcible transfer of the German-speaking population from Czechoslovakia to Germany after World War II. This debate, for the most part, has taken place in the absence of the spokesmen of the expellees and their descendants but it has often been stimulated by various statements and demands voiced by these groups. Given the fact that the policy lines of the Federal Republic of Germany concerning Central and Eastern Europe have not yet been determined in detail, there seems to be some room for initiatives and pressures coming from these quarters. German political parties, especially those participating in the governmental coalition, are inclined to respond to such pressures since these could influence their majority in the Federal Parliament. The Czech public, on the other hand, tends to overestimate the weight of the expellees’ lobby association on two counts: it overlooks how relatively weak is the membership of this body, called the *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft*, when measured by the number of all eligible individuals (those who themselves after 1945 were expelled and their immediate families); it also lacks a clear idea of the real intentions or possible claims which the *Landsmannschaft* might raise against the Czech Republic, or how far the German federal government would be prepared to go to back to such claims.

Despite the sometimes aggressive rhetoric of the *Landsmannschaft*, its actual political goals are difficult to gauge. They range from the simple demand that the Czech Republic formally recognise the act of the transfer and the pertinent legislation (the decrees of President Edvard Beneš dated 1945) as being incompatible with the principles of international law, to calls occasionally voiced at the *Landsmannschaft*’s congresses for the return of all expellees and their offspring to their original homes and for their right to opt either for becoming citizens of the Czech Republic or for the annexation of the territory, settled by them, by Germany (a replica of the Munich solution of 1938). Understandably, the Czechs find the statements of the latter kind rather frightening. They fail to see, however, the plain absurdity of such claims. Disregarding the probably poor response of the expellees to such an offer, even if it were made (according to the statistics gathered by the *Landsmannschaft* itself, no more than 3-5 percent of members would like to return to the Czech lands), in the hypothetical case of a public vote on the fate of the Sudeten German territory the Czech population now residing there would have to have its say too, so that the outcome might be easy to predict. Most important of all, however, is the fact that such demands sharply contradict the Federal Republic of Germany’s solemn commitment not to seek, under any circumstances, to change the borders as they now exist in Europe.

Greater-German Anachronisms

Thus we have to conclude that the current apprehensions of many Czech circles about an imminent ‘German threat’ are not justified and have to be rather deplored. What is to be

even more regretted, however, is the circumstance which these apprehensions reveal, namely that Czech thinking in this respect moves in a somewhat unreal world. It can be explained, even excused, by almost a century of traumatic experience; until 1989, Czech society had not been confronted with any other German regime than either totalitarian or hostile to its political and cultural aspirations.¹ Yet in view of the urgent need to rebuild the basis of the Czech-German relations this is not a valid argument. The problem at hand is not, as many Czechs perceive it today, primarily a 'Czech-Sudeten German problem' – no more than the problem of Polish-German relations is the problem of the Oder-Neisse border line. There exists, beyond any doubt, an ethical problem, not only for the Czechs but for all nations and political leaders who participated in, or backed, the widespread post-war transfers of populations, a problem which is connected with their implicit endorsement of the questionable principle of collective guilt. This problem will have to be eventually faced and resolved by everybody concerned. It does not follow, however, that until then the spokesmen of the groups who were the targets of these transfers and now are citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany should be the principal partners in the debate on the relations between Germany and her eastern and south-eastern neighbours.

Continuing the debate under such conditions would mean to implicitly assume the persistence of the situation as it existed in Central and Eastern Europe until the end of World War II and which History has adjudged as intractable. The main cause of its intractability was the goal set by the German national movement, and later adopted by all national movements in this region during the nation-building period, to create ethnically homogenous nation-states in an ethnographic environment that, barring systematic use of force, precluded by definition the achievement of such a goal. The policies of the nations in this region, especially those of Germany and the states situated east and south-east of its borders, were governed by wishful thinking and the deliberate denial of obvious facts rather than by pragmatic considerations. This was hardly a reliable basis of stable relationships. Things came to a head when after a century of unsuccessful attempts at the homogenisation of the ethnic structure of the individual nation-states in the area by more or less conventional means, Hitler's Third Reich resorted to indiscriminate exercise of brute force and eventually to genocide. After a devastating war, the defeat of Nazism and massive 'ethnic cleansing', the objective conditions in the Central European region changed profoundly. By a strange paradox, it looks today as if the German catastrophe had helped materialise, in an unexpected form, the Greater German dream, the pursuit of which had been the very reason of this catastrophe. The German nation-state today is, for all practical purposes, ethnically homogenous. So are the two Slavic nation-states in its eastern neighbourhood whose internal ethnic problems had caused chronic instability in this part of the continent.

The Need to Acknowledge New Realities

The rebirth of Germany as a pluralist federal polity in 1949, followed forty years later by unification with the territory temporarily controlled by the Soviet Union, marked an explicit and irrevocable repudiation of whatever may have then remained of Greater German designs. The circumstance just cited, namely that those who for decades had been

¹) The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) is an exception. Political orientations of the Federal Republic of Germany after 1948 were interpreted in Prague in a distorted way until the year 1989.

both the object and the moving force of Greater German aspirations, the German-speaking ethnic groups outside the borders of the German nation-state, form today an integral part of the German national body politic, renders this repudiation even more irrevocable. Under these conditions, the current Czech debate on the German question appears to contain an element of anachronism. Czech relations to Germany will have to be based on other foundations than those of uneasy coexistence and subconscious perceptions of possible threat. For the Czechs, it is indispensable to recognise the scope and the depth of the changes which German society has undergone since World War II. Equally, if not more important in this context are the changes in the realm of international power relations in Europe, indeed in the very nature of the economic and political organisation of the old continent.

Germany's 'change of heart' concerning its smaller neighbours, especially in the east, is both anchored in, and reinforced by, critically significant structural transformations of German society. During the last fifty years or so, it has become in essence a civil society, as opposed to military-minded society, i.e. in the connotation given to this term by Herbert Spencer rather than by John Locke. This change is clearly reflected in a shift in the scale of occupational prestige. It is also, above all, a consumer society bestowing social recognition upon achievement in the economic sphere and standard of living. Of the traditional high status of the military hardly any vestige is left, while the prestige of the bureaucracy and the almost proverbial German submissiveness *vis-à-vis* state authority have notably diminished. This is a social climate which is not favourable to imperialism. Moreover, from the point of view of pure demographic strength, Germany seems to be losing much of its dynamism. It could be argued, in a figurative sense but without much exaggeration, that the German national body is slowly shrinking (the same conclusion, of course, can be drawn from the demographic development trends observed in the Czech Republic). Population increases lately recorded – if we disregard the effects of the incorporation of the former GDR – have been due, almost exclusively, to the immigration of German speaking people from Eastern Europe who had not been expelled from their countries in the years 1945-47 and in the form of the naturalisation of migrant workers. Societies manifesting similar signs of evolution are not likely, if we may judge by historical evidence, to resort to policies of expansionist adventures.

However, an even stronger argument about the obsolescence of the image of Germany as a threat to its neighbours in the east and south-east can be made when we consider the ongoing process of European integration. This process has already advanced so far – especially in the economic sphere – that Germany's relapse into an imperialist course – supposing that internal forces promoting such a relapse should prevail, of which there is no evidence at the present – appears well-nigh impossible. It could occur only on the condition of Germany's isolation, conceivable solely at the price of the disintegration of the European Union. It is safe to assume that no German regime would survive the consequences for the standard of living of the German population of such an *Alleingang*. Moreover, it is unlikely that the rest of Europe, not to mention the United States, would passively accept such a development.

These arguments should sound convincing enough to any pragmatic mind, and therefore prove sufficient to dispel the lingering apprehensions of the Czech public. Yet, although indispensable, the recognition alone that the presumed 'German danger' is now contained by various internal, as well as external, forces will not do justice to the nature of the change that actually has come about. The recognition may be granted from a tradi-

tional power-politics perspective, characteristic of the time of national 'sacred egoism', military coalitions and balances. Considering various contributions to the incipient, rather timid debate on foreign policy problems in the Czech Republic – or, for that matter, in any ex-communist nation of the region – the observer has to conclude that the politically engaged strata there do not fully appreciate the consequences of European integration. Their failure has a dual adverse effect. On the one hand, it hinders their proper understanding of the situation in that member country of the European Union which is of key importance to them, i.e. in Germany; on the other hand, it prevents them from correctly assessing and determining the objectives and the priorities of the reconstruction efforts now under way in their respective societies. For these societies must not only overcome, and rid themselves of the unwanted legacy of the communist experiment but also, and above all, adapt to the Europe of the 21st century. In other words, it cannot be emphasised often enough that the post-communist transformation is not a return to *status quo ante* but a vitally necessary movement ahead in view of catching up on another more general transformative process with still longer time horizons which has been unfolding west of the erstwhile Iron Curtain for more than fifty years: the process of regionalisation and European integration.

The Impact of European Integration

The inter-related property of the two transformation processes and the interdependence of their outcome should prompt the circles responsible for the pursuit of social reconstruction in the formerly communist-dominated nations to rethink their goals, reorder their priorities and, if need be, revise their strategy. In this light, too, the future relations of the Czech Republic to the Federal Republic of Germany require reconsideration. There is more at stake in this context than just the form and the context of the mutual contacts between two states. Integration into the European Union involves, for all societies concerned, establishing new perceptions of collective identity. This may be a very slow course, but it ultimately aims at a change in the category of notions which since the awakening of modern national consciousness has been crucial for the Czech-German relationship. A good deal of what has been perceived as the substance of 'Czechness' (*češství*) has always been articulated in a rather negative form, that is in contrast to everything German. Until T. G. Masaryk opened the well-known debate on the meaning of Czech history, a little over a century ago, being Czech for a great majority of his compatriots signified simply 'not being German'. This view survived, and the dramatic confrontations between the two nations experienced in the first half of the 20th century seem to provide it with new justification. In a united Europe, however, the Czechs, among others, will be fellow-citizens of the Germans. This may prove difficult to reconcile with the idea of Czech national identity as conceived of in the traditional terms; it would seem to underscore the need for the Czechs to further explore and develop the approach sketched by Masaryk, which leads to the definition of a nation as a political, rather than as an ethnic, entity.

European identity in itself, to be sure, does not preclude, or necessarily collide with, the collective identities of its individual member nations. As a political unit, the European Union purports to be a federation, not a centralised superstate; as it has been put in a more poetical way, it is to become "a mosaic, not a cocktail". It nevertheless remains true that, when fully developed at a point in a more distant future, Europe will em-

body the model of a political nation. The national consciousness of its constituent collectivities will be subordinate to that of the federal whole.

The Czechs, as we have already suggested, might feel more comfortable in the future European home if they espoused the idea of a nation as a collectivity sharing a certain value system rather than merely language and racial roots. If they make this choice, it will be possible to argue that the contingency of European integration has helped convert the Czechs to Masaryk's views; that it has achieved something which not even Masaryk's triumph in 1918 had been able to accomplish. This point is not of historic interest only. Accepting the political theory of a nation should facilitate for the Czechs the task of finding a basis for good and stable relations with its most important partner-to-be in the European Union, Germany. As for Germany itself, it appears to be moving in the right direction, since in the ongoing debate about the main basis of German citizenship the notion of shared trust in the constitutional order of the Federal Republic (*'Verfassungsloyalität'*) providing such a basis seems to receive maximum support. It remains to be seen how far and in what way the problems and the pressures to which Germany is presently exposed may influence this development. The reunification, by the very fact that it brought together not only two parts of one nation but also two distinct societies, should in principle highlight for the Germans the advantages of the political concept of a nation. It cannot be denied, however, that in practice it has also reinforced certain narrowly nationalistic currents of thought and provided opportunity for their violent manifestations.

Possible Development of Czech-German Relations – Various Scenarios

Regardless of how fast or how slowly the search for an adequate basis of good Czech-German relations may advance in the immediate future, or how successful will be its outcome, the internal development of the two societies unfolding in a shared geopolitical and economic space will, because of its own momentum, participate in shaping these relations. The incorporation by Germany of an ex-communist territory – the former GDR – has initiated within unified Germany an important transformation process which, although *sui generis*, is nonetheless akin to that of the comprehensive reconstruction currently underway in the Czech Republic. Its results, too, will influence the nature and the quality of Germany's rapport with her small south-eastern neighbour. The latter will also be co-determined by factors of longer standing among which the economic ones will play a prominent role. It should be recalled that before World War II Germany was the most important trade partner of what was then Czechoslovakia and – even more significantly – that this country of relatively modest size ranked in ninth place on the German foreign trade list. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, as the economic exchanges of Czechoslovakia with the West rebounded, the German share among them quickly took the lead. The trend has continued ever since, through the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Czech Republic.

Yet there is more to the current transformation processes than just various kinds of economic reshaping. Much more. The protracted unsuccessful communist experiment seriously damaged the social fabric in the regions which were its objects. Its slow regeneration and social re-stratification, notably the recreation of the middle class, of autonomous voluntary movements and associations, of independent intellectual élites (Karl Mannheim's *"freischwebende Intelligenz"*), as well as of all other indispensable prerequisites of civil society (here truly in the Lockian sense of the term) – is an important proc-

ess in its own right. It can be broken down into a number of sub-processes which all run parallel to that of economic reconstruction. At the same time, the entire realm of industrial civilisation, in the West and in the East alike, is subject to continuous change, the rate of which accelerates, a function of technological progress. It is important to note that every single process which we have mentioned here advances at its own speed and that, furthermore, this speed is also nation- or society-specific, different collectivities developing slower or faster in different key areas. This latter fact is essential in comparing nations and appraising their future relations. Thus it is relevant to the subject of our discussion, i.e. to the nature of Czech-German relations and to their possible evolution in the future.

It is obvious that the internal development of both societies will obey its own dynamic and that their mutual relationship will be influenced also by the situation in which each of them will happen to find itself at a given time. Several patterns of this relationship will ensue, based on the match of every conceivable situation in either of them with every imaginable state of affairs in the other. In this way, we could build independent scenarios for the various combinations. Theoretically, their number might turn out to be very high, but it will be sufficient, for the purpose of our discussion, if we address only those which are the most probable. In this category, as the reader may note, the principal variable determining our choice is the degree to which the one or the other society, respectively, will master what we consider to be its present most serious challenge posed by the process of change: Germany's is the problems connected with its recent reunification, that is with the integration and assimilation of the former GDR, a collectivity which after more than forty years of forcible systematic efforts at restructuring on the Soviet model had hardly anything in common with the West German society except the use of the same written language; the Czech Republic's is the problems connected with the post-communist transformation and with its admission to the European Union.

Three Possible Major Scenarios – Czech Republic

The range of all conceivable variants of the development of post-communist transformation in Central and Eastern Europe in general and in the Czech Republic in particular is too wide to be considered in detail in the context of our examination of possible future Czech-German relations. Even if we elected this demanding approach, we would still be faced with the problem of the choice of suitable indicators necessary to successfully monitor the progress of this transformation. As we have already brought to attention, the indicators at hand are almost exclusively of an economic nature and therefore somewhat one-sided for our purpose. We must look for additional variables which may help us build the most probable scenarios of the phenomenon under scrutiny. What we actually need is to identify specific benchmarks in the projected course of the transformation process, distinct enough to permit us to predict the type and the quality of the relationships between the two states and societies that may prevail at the various stages of this process. Perhaps the most useful point of reference could be found in the degree to which the Czech Republic will prove able to meet the standards for admission to the European Union. The yardsticks of this ability, as we have already seen, are also for the most part economic, but there are significant political measurement criteria as well. In principle, we could imagine three possible outcomes of the transformation process to which Czech society is currently subject and which could bear upon its readiness to enter the European Union, thus also helping shape its rapport with Germany. Conversely, it is possible to

foresee three major variants of the outcome of the current reunification and integration process in Germany which in their turn could in a significant way influence Germany's relations with her neighbours including the Czech Republic. We will deal with the former scenarios first.

The three main alternatives that logically come to mind in this context include: successful completion by the Czech Republic of the post-communist transformation, satisfying the requirements for membership of the European Union; sufficient progress of the path of transformation, so as to allow the country's admission to this body albeit with some qualifications; failure to meet the Union's standards, calling for the temporary bestowal of a special status on the Czech Republic, such as that of an associated member, which would place it somewhere on the periphery of the integrated European community. Any of these possible outcomes will have an important impact upon the quality of Czech-German relationships in the immediate future. However, it is necessary to take into consideration that, aside from the problem of Czech membership of the EU, the transformation process in this country has from the start been influenced by economic and political interaction with other European nations, and that Germany has played a key role in this interaction. Thus the Czech-German relations of today are to a notable extent co-determining the outcome of the transformation, and help shape the form of the very same relationships of tomorrow.

A Closer Look at the Scenarios

Let us now examine the three principal scenarios in more detail:

1. *Czech-German relations with the Czech Republic acquiring full EU membership.* Joining the European Union as a fully-fledged member, with all rights and responsibilities (accepting common currency, participating in the agreements on free movement of capital and labour and unlimited right of settlement for all nationals of all other member countries, unrestricted sale of real estate to these nationals, etc.) would expose the Czech economy to the full impact of intra-Union competition. Among others, it would bind the Czech Republic more closely to the FRG; however, in view of the principle of reciprocity governing the EU statutes, this interdependence would develop on a more or less equal footing. One of the consequences of full Union membership might be politically sensitive for the Czechs, namely the possibility for the former Sudeten German expellees or their descendants to return to Czech territory and take possession, by purchase or otherwise, of the property located there. This might make some Czech circles apprehensive to the point of becoming hesitant about full integration within the EU, although it is unlikely that their view would prevail should the country be confronted with such a choice.

2. *Czech-German relations in the case of the Czech Republic obtaining EU membership with qualifications.* This alternative would imply that the Czech Republic, on becoming part of the EU, would not, or not immediately – assume all rights and responsibilities typical of the majority of members. This would hardly constitute an unprecedented exception; there are several member nations among the fifteen which form today's Union and which do not participate in all its treaties and agreements, for example, that instituting a common European currency (Maastricht) or that abolishing personal document controls at state borders (Schengen), and so on. It is obvious that, as with these nations, the suspension of certain obligations in the case of the Czech Republic could be only temporary. At first sight, such an arrangement might be welcome to those Czech

quarters who are anxious about too deep 'German penetration' which immediate full membership might facilitate, and it could even uphold the illusion of having the best of the two worlds. However, the illusion would not be tenable in the long run; it would also entail the risk of delaying the process of adaptation to EU standards, which is inseparable from the process of post-communist transformation, and of further widening the gap between the economic and societal level of the Czech Republic and that of most of its European partners, above all Germany. In contrast to the first scenario, the relations between the two countries would be 'stratified', that is uneven, based on unequal crucial positions and premises, the Czech partner being at a notable disadvantage. If maintained over an extended period of time, these inequalities would tend to reduce the Czech economy to a second-rank appendage to that of the FRG, supplying the latter chiefly with raw materials and cheap labour. Eventually, this would not mean the best but, on the contrary, the worst of all possible worlds for the Czech Republic.

3. *Czech-German relations under the assumption of the Czech Republic not joining the European Union in the foreseeable future.* This third scenario, by its very nature, would almost certainly bring about the type of relations which in the previous scenario appears only as a serious risk. Remaining on the periphery of an integrated Europe would, of course, put Czech society at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* all member nations of the EU; however, in no respect this would be more evident and painful than in relation to Germany. It would also render more or less permanent the dangerous development lag which is the legacy of the unsuccessful communist experiment. The consequences might be fatal. The Czech economy could be relegated to the grey zone somewhere between the Second and the Third World, with all the inevitable social and political consequences. It is difficult to imagine that even the most fervent Czech nationalist in the nineteenth century tradition, concerned about the indispensable state sovereignty surrender required from EU members, would wish this to happen or to pay this price for the preservation of the established prerogatives of the nation-state. Yet this is precisely where orthodox nationalism, afraid of opening itself to the world and seeking insulation and protection from foreign influence and competition, would in the end lead.

If we were to assess the probability of these individual scenarios materialising, we would place scenario 2 at the top, with scenario 1 closely following. Scenario 3 appears to us as being the least probable. This brief review of all three clearly reveals the fact that a speedy conclusion of the transformation process and an association with the European Union are two conditions *sine quibus non* for contemporary Czech society if it truly aspires to reintegrate itself in the community of advanced industrial nations of the continent and to reclaim its once quite important share in the international division of labour. It also reveals another fact: namely, that any progress in this direction will bring it closer to its economically and politically most significant neighbour, Germany.

Three Possible Scenarios – Germany

The establishment of a German identity valid both in the old Federal Republic and in the new eastern provinces which in the past formed the GDR, will be a difficult process. "We are the nation" was the slogan of East German demonstrators in autumn 1989. After the fall of the Berlin Wall the slogan was slightly but importantly changed: "We are *one* nation". Many thoughtful German authors, as for example, Ulrich Wickert, in a book called "*Angst vor Deutschland*" ask a question that appears to be relevant here: what kind of a

nation? The Germans themselves, whether they lived in the West or in the East during the previous forty years, are not quite sure what their identity is.

Thus many questions are still open. Will a true civil society develop in the east? Will it come into existence simply by extending the notion of a pluralist society, established and stabilised in the Federal Republic, to the new provinces? Or else will a new common identity develop through the fusion of both parts, will it be, above all, an identity encompassing some specific experience of the eastern parts? Will a state develop where the Western model may not be fully adopted by the eastern part, yet where no synthesis of both parts will be achieved either, but instead where two distinct though similar identities as well as two socio-political and cultural orientations are maintained?

The answer to the key question of whether a German identity will develop whose core will be the idea of civil society may be given in the form of three scenarios of the possible future development of Germany.

1. The *first scenario* is pessimistic and also highly improbable in its pure form. Owing to the fact that it is, on occasion, mentioned by some German authors, we will summarise it here in a very concise form. It is based on the idea that the unification of 1990 will prove to be a great misfortune for the whole country, especially for its eastern, but also for its western part, and that it will lead to a phenomenon which can be called 'bleeding white'. In this scenario, the German economy will not be able to absorb the costs of the unification and the reconstruction of the eastern territories, and as a consequence it will begin to weaken and in the end to lose the ability to act as the economic engine of Europe. To this should be added the high social costs and wages in German industry which, together with the burden resulting from the reconstruction of the East-German economy and infrastructure, will lower the competitiveness of Germany in world markets. A well-known representative of German industry Kurt J. Lauk some years ago expressed succinctly his worries in this respect: "Following on reunification, rifts in Germany's social fabric have become visible again. The vision of Germany's role as a partner in the world needs to be defined anew. The Germans are being closely observed from abroad, sometimes mistrustfully. It has once again become difficult to be German... The fear of uncertainty is felt both at home and abroad... No appropriate new political vision has emerged in Germany, either for the country or for the continent." ("Germany in Transition", *Daedalus*, Winter 1994).

It is well worth observing that the newest prognoses about the German economy do not support the most pessimistic views, but the apprehension concerning the long-term development of the German economy on the part of the both native and foreign economists seems to persist.

There exists, however, a more probable sub-variant of the first scenario. It presupposes that, despite the unification within one state, despite the unified legal and institutional framework, Germany will remain divided into two societies. This situation is usually described as 'one state and two societies'. Michael Stürmer, a German historian, wrote that until 1989 Germany was a single nation in two states, whereas nowadays there seem to be two nations in one state. This scenario points to the continuing differences between the mentalities of the two parts of the country, to their mutual alienation and even growing rivalry.

2. The *second scenario* is optimistic. It presupposes the development of a new common identity, which will not only be a West-German version expanded to the East,

but which will incorporate also the East-German experience into the new German concept of a civil society. The way towards this new identity will be found when the East Germans have shaken off the feeling of inferiority and got rid of the impression that they are merely objects of colonisation, and when the West Germans overcome their indifference, arrogance and the inclination to act as omniscient protectors. This scenario is European at the same time. Such a German identity and German civil society will facilitate the cultivation of good relationships towards the new 'open' societies in the east and the assumption of the role of a nation which not only understands its eastern neighbours, but also helps them to integrate into the European Union.

3. The *third scenario* is realistic and the most probable. There are very good reasons to expect that the consistency of a legal, economic, and technical framework within which German society will develop in the nearest future will contribute to the perception of a new, pluralistically formed German identity, the core of which will rest on a democratic political system, on the respect for human rights, cultural plurality and on emphasis upon German humanistic traditions. However, this scenario takes into account that not only the cultural and social, but also some political differences between the original Federal Republic (West Germany) and the provinces of the former GDR will be preserved. It fits also the German political philosophy of federalism. Indeed, the contemporary status of Bavaria *vis-à-vis* other German provinces is of a similar nature.

This scenario further assumes that contemporary German society and its principal political representation have accepted the political consequences of the Second World War, which was caused by the Nazis, to whom Germany had given in without any notable resistance. European co-operation and peace would begin to break down should it be otherwise. The scenario also presupposes that through the common endeavour of the German political representation and German non-governmental associations, on the one hand, and the new democratic states in East-Central Europe and their non-governmental associations, on the other hand, it will be possible to create a sphere of co-operation and good relations in what, until now, has passed for a 'crisis zone'. Seldom in the modern history of Europe, as well as in the history of the relations between Czechs and Germans, has the situation been as hopeful as it is at present.

Non-Quantifiable Essentials

All three scenarios outlined here aim at tracing the most likely course of the development of Czech-German relations not only in the narrowly economic but also in a broader political sense. Yet they are far from able to cover the entire scope of contacts and interactions between the two societies where at present equally, if not even more, penetrating changes are occurring – and have to occur if these relations are to rest on a solid stable basis. Our difficulty is due to the circumstance that even in examining non-economic factors which may shape them, we had to rely on more or less quantitative indicators. This approach obliged us to leave out of our consideration a number of provinces of social life where non-quantifiable socio-psychological syndromes originate. Yet it is in this sphere that the need for change may be the most urgent. It runs against terrible odds, since it challenges collective attitudes and representations which are anchored in idiosyncratic historical experiences of whole generations, if not centuries, and thus impervious to rational argument. Both societies, the Czech as well as the German, suffer from this handicap; however, in our discussion here we have addressed the problem chiefly as it represents itself to the Czech side.

The task now confronting the Czechs is to carry out a fundamental revision of the entrenched images and perceptions associated with the German partner of tomorrow and has two aspects – a negative and a positive one – and it is hard to decide which of the two is the more formidable. As responsible members of a democratic polity, they must prove able to critically examine and, where necessary, to discard the notions relative to their geopolitical position in Europe and security needs. The gravity of this problem is given by the fact that here we are not dealing merely with emotionally loaded prejudices and stereotypes, but rather with clearly defined long-term policy concepts supported by a certain brand of political theory with a long tradition. Quite concretely, in this context we have to think of the interpretation of Czech history as of a continuous struggle with the German rival over the control of the Moldau-Elbe plateau in Central Europe, offered 150 years ago by František Palacký and since then turned into an almost instinctive element of Czech historical self-perception. It translated, among others, into the foreign policy concept of the First Czechoslovak Republic to which the containment of the German threat was absolutely central. It could not have been different under the international order then prevailing, which recognised no authority above the egoistic will of the nation-state and therefore provided little more than the framework and the rules of the zero-sum game of the powerful. However, in view of a completely different order now in the making on the European continent, this concept, as all similar ethnocentric perspectives entertained by other European nations and societies, has become obsolescent and must be abandoned.

This negative, destructive and cleansing act has at the same time to be complemented by a positive, creative one, which, as we have already suggested, may reveal itself as equally or more challenging: a shift in the perception of collective identity, subordinating national solidarity to that resulting from membership in the integrated European community of peoples. It would be unrealistic to expect that a shift of this magnitude could be effected by Czech society – or any other society, for that matter – in isolation, drawing exclusively on its own resources. The change therefore cannot be completed before its entry. As in the case of the nations already part of the European Union, this crucial socio-psychological transformation process is likely to take full momentum only under the impact of the exposure of the Czech Republic to the forces operating inside the transnational body. However, the search for a new basis of Czech-German relations which must be engaged in here and now will constitute an important preliminary phase of this process.

JIRÍ MUSIL is Professor of the Central European University and of Charles University, Prague. His main areas of study are urban and regional studies, and political sociology. He has published several books on urban problems, housing sociology, urbanisation and on social ecology. His last book written in English was The End of Czechoslovakia. At present he is concentrating on the political changes and problems of Czech society and identity.

ZDENĚK SUDA is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, USA. His main areas of study are political sociology, economic sociology, problems of nationalism and national identity. In 1980 he published a well-known book on the history of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. At present he is a senior researcher in the CEU research project "German Society and Politics in the European Context".